

"To promote understanding and appreciation of the religious and spiritual values which abide in the processes and relationships of agriculture and rural life; to define their significance and relate them to the Christian enterprise at home and abroad."

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The Bible and Agriculture

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As a farmer in India I have come to regard the Bible as a new book, larger and better, especially the Old Testament. Cattle raising, sheep and goat herding and agriculture in modern India are in general very much the same as they were in the time of Abraham and Joseph and Moses and Isaiah and of our Lord Himself. I have gained a deeper respect for the Old Testament as I have studied it here in the Orient. I regard the book of Genesis, especially the first two chapters, as one of the most up-to-date and important documents the human race possesses. We have the marvelous account of creation which describes in non-technical language the mighty work of God. Being only a farmer and not a theologian I have spent little time in considering who wrote these books of the Old Testament or when they were written. I thank God that they are written, and that, for the good of the human race, they have revealed in such clearness the unfolding and enlarging purposes of God, who hath in these days spoken unto us by His Son.

Man's
primacy
in
nature

In the first two chapters of Genesis is stated a principle upon which a continuing, progressive human society may endure. The first command (Gen. I.28) recorded from Almighty God to man says: 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.' The second part of this marvelous command tells man to 'subdue the earth.' Before man can do this, he must first subdue and discipline himself, only then can he apprehend this marvelous world, which God called 'Good' when He created it. As man obeys this command, he finds that out of its treasures of field and forest and mine and quarry and air and lake and river and sea, he can get every material thing in abundance that is necessary for his physical well-being.

Again this command says: 'Man shall have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air and every living thing that moveth upon the earth.' For practically all my working life (over thirty years) I have been face to face with a civilization, a religion and a philosophy which denies this statement of Genesis. The Hindu pilgrims on the long, weary, dangerous marches to the source of the Ganges, and to the other shrines, far back in the snows of the Himalayas, where food is very difficult to get and very expensive, worship the sacred fish. All along the way in the

beautiful hill streams and rivers, well-stocked with fish, one can see the pilgrims feeding the sacred fish and bowing down to them, yet often in great physical hunger themselves.)

The
Concept
of the
Family

The last part of the second chapter of Genesis (2:24) says: 'For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh.' All thoughtful people the world over realize that the home is the basic institution in any civilization. As the home is, so will the civilization be. Different civilizations have tried different ways of establishing the home. Some have tried to build the home with polygamy and concubinage, a double standard, one for the man, another for the woman, but degrading to woman, and therefore in the last analysis, degrading and harmful to man. Other civilizations have developed what is known as the joint family system, where the daughters are given in marriage, and go out from their father's house but all the sons marry and bring their brides into their father's house. The mother of the sons rules within the home. Very frequently the daughters-in-law have an unhappy time. The suicide rate of wives in the joint family system is about as high as in any society anywhere.

Agrarian
Leaders
and
Prophets

I would point out that almost all the great characters in the Old Testament were intimately related to the soil. Abraham and Lot had their flocks and herds. Jacob and Moses knew what it was to be out under the stars watching herds and flocks of cattle, camels, sheep and goats. David, before he became king, for the protection of his flock, had fought and killed wild beasts. The most beautiful Psalm in that whole wonderful collection, describes the relationship of the shepherd to the sheep, drawn directly out of the life the psalmist lived. This figure of the shepherd is used by our Lord Himself. One of the most beautiful teachings of our Lord is that He is the Good Shepherd. Not only were the prophets familiar with animal husbandry, they were also familiar with the growing of grain. They ploughed their fields, they kept orchards and vineyards. They knew what to do to make the soil produce. They knew the uses of cultivation and manures. They knew the value of irrigation water. The striking figure of the 'water of life' is taken directly from water poured on dry soil, bringing it to life and productivity.

Is there in any modern literature such a concise, complete and true statement of the causes of depression as Haggai gives: 'Ye have sown much and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.'

Sound
Economic
Planning

It may not be out of place in these days of depression with the consequent train of suffering, poverty, and loss, to remind ourselves that the Old Testament clearly teaches that godliness is profitable for all things. 'If ye walk in my statutes and keep my commandments and do them, then will I give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time; and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.' Lev. 26.34.5. And 'The plowman shall overtake the

reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed.' Amos 9.13. In the Ganges valley today, farm holdings are small, on the average less than three acres. The farmer and his family are not gainfully occupied on their farm for more than an average of sixty days throughout the year. What they produce in these sixty days has to support them for three hundred and sixty-five days. This is one great reason for India's poverty. The farm produce of wheat, rice, barley, beans or peas usually takes from ten days to two weeks to thresh under the feet of the oxen. There follows enforced idleness for three months. Hence what a marvelous picture these two passages give us. The harvest is so great that threshing occupies all the time of the farmer between the time of harvest in April or May to the vintage in June and July, and from the vintage to the sowing in September and October. This means fairly steady employment for most of the year, and consequently better economic conditions--'Bread to the full.' Joseph in times of plenty collected the grain into storehouses, saving it for times of scarcity. This kept the prices from collapse, and tended to equalize them. Because of Joseph's foresight, when famine came, not only did prices not rise as high as they otherwise might have done, but many human lives were saved from death by hunger. This is an early record of economic planning. It may be worth studying by those responsible for America's New Deal.

The prophet Isaiah has many agricultural allusions and references. He is the best farmer in the Old Testament. In the first chapter: 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib,' reveals his knowledge of animal husbandry. Isaiah (Chapter 28.24-29) also tells of the preparation of the seed bed and of how different crops are sown and harvested, and like the man of God he is, says: 'For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him.' In the thirty-fifth chapter he tells us how the desert shall rejoice and shall blossom as the rose and in the wilderness shall waters break out and streams in the desert. The beginning of the fifty-third chapter is a description of what we think of as a modern discovery, that is, the so-called dry-farming. Over 2500 years before America knew or understood dry farming, Isaiah had practiced it. 'He shall grow up before him as a tender plant and as root out of a dry ground,' is dry farming. Again in 55.10 he says: 'For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater.' It is as a farmer and not as an outsider that he writes. He notices the sequence, the purpose, first of all, to have seed for the sower. Unless we save the seed from this harvest, we can have no crop next year. Even before the farmer gives bread to himself, and his children, he makes sure that his seed is secure for the next harvest.

The
Science
of
Agriculture

I wish to call attention to our Lord and his relation to agriculture. The belief of the church that our Lord was a carpenter is based upon two rhetorical questions: 'Is not this the carpenter's son?' Matt. 13.55, and 'Is not this the carpenter?' Mark 6.3. We know that every Jewish boy learned a trade. The Apostle Paul, for

The
Rural
Craftsman

instance, in spite of his wealth, education, and social standing, had learned tent-making which would permit him to earn his living on occasion if his wealth failed him. So Jesus like other Jewish boys had learned something which would enable him to earn his own living. We know at that time in Palestine, as in many parts of the world today, during the time of the preparation of the seed bed and the sowing of the seed, and the reaping and threshing of the crop, that artisans and tradesmen, men, women and children left bench and shop and home and went out to help in the fields. Agriculture is the basic industry of the world. The furrow is the dividing line between barbarism and civilization. So in order to secure an adequate food supply the young and old, rich and poor, men and women, all classes, at the right season forsook all other occupation and went into the fields to help to secure the adequate and necessary food supplies. So that while our Lord worked as a carpenter, living as he did in the village of Nazareth, he most probably went out and worked in the fields at seed time and harvest. He learned farming thoroughly. This we know because of the familiar and intimate way he speaks of farming.

The
Farmer

Many of our Lord's parables are concerned with agriculture. He spoke His parables not as an on-looker, but as one who is actually familiar with and had had practical experience in the thing he was talking about, for example, the parable of the sower, the parable of the vineyard, the parable of the wheat and the tares, the parable of the lost sheep. Note the accuracy with which our Lord observed. He said: 'He who puts his hand (not hands) to the plow.' Luke 9.62. The oriental plow has only one handle. The country plow used today in India is essentially the same as was used in the time of our Lord and of Isaiah and of Joshua and Joseph. The plowman needs one hand for the goad, or, in India, for twisting the tails of the oxen. The plow being shaped like the bottom of a boat, if the man holding this plow in his right hand, looks back, the plow is slightly turned and rides out of the ground. It therefore fails to accomplish the purpose for which men plough.

I write this in the hope that it will send more to study the word of God. If men today would only take the word of God seriously, and put its teachings into practice in all parts of our life, our ordinary business life, as well as our spiritual life, we could then expect to see the new heaven and the new earth--the Kingdom of God here and now among men, for the coming of which our Lord bade us pray.
